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ALLIES KEY TO DEFEATING ANTI-GUN AXIS

by Robert K. Brown

In August of this year, gun owners and the NRA suffered the most grievous defeat in history. The crime bill, more aptly titled the "Hug-A-Thug" bill, passed with moderate Republicans (primarily from the northeast, but that doesn't surprise us now, does it?) pissing away an opportunity to mortally wound Slick Willie's failed presidency.

Now we have not only the nose of the camel under the tent, but also the head, neck and half-a-hump. And if we don't start doing things differently, the whole stinking animal is going to be in the tent and we're going to be out on our asses.

NRA officials have admitted they no longer have the power to stop anti-gun legislation simply by lobbying the dorks inside the Beltway. The mistake they made was to assume that given enough money, their high-priced suede shoe artists could work miracles in Washington. They can't.

Don't get me wrong, Washington lobbyists can be effective, but when facing an increasingly hostile media establishment and a traitorous White House who can schmooze, booze and bamboozle the whores of Congress, no lobbyist is worth a pinch of shit unless he is armed with a helluva block of constituent votes or massive publicity generating power. We have other options, however.

For several years I've been railing about the desirability and necessity of the NRA forming coalitions with other organizations with large constituencies. This would give us a much larger voice, and since congressmen care more about getting votes than right or wrong, much more impact.

The NRA has always prided itself, though frankly I think it's a false pride, on being a one-issue organization. The time for that has changed. While I'm certainly not recommending that the NRA ally itself with hugely controversial groups such as those involved in

the abortion debate, I feel strongly there are other organizations, like those fighting for taxpayers' rights, veterans groups and conservative bodies, that would like the NRA's support on issues vital to them.

And if we can't get the national leadership of organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion on board because of their limiting charters from Congress, then we should make a strong effort to work with state and local chapters of these groups to bring them into a coalition which will multiply our strength well beyond the 3 to 5 million the NRA can muster.

It's too late to do this for the 8 November elections, but we have

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FROM IMPROBABLE
CAUSE TO ACCI-
DENTAL DISCLOSURE**

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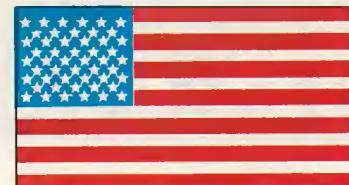
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Croat Special Forces trooper in snow smock during winter operations training south of Zagreb. He is armed with suppressed, folding-stock AK variant. See related story, "Cold Weather Commandos" on page 40. Photo: Krpan Jasmin



The Man Who H

Most people think of Vietnam as a terrifying experience: rockets whistling in from unknown directions, sappers charging through the wire and snipers firing from every tree. Such things happened, of course, but for rear echelon troops at the supply base in Long Binh boredom was the prime enemy — a long and dreary drill of work, heat and dust.

For an ordnance officer with a nuclear weapons specialty, there was even less to do. At times Lieutenant John "Jack" Throckmorton felt he was sitting out the war. Like the good officer he aspired to be, he sought more, and his second-in-command, Chief Warrant Officer Jerry Johnson,

ducted him into the team-house bar, fed him drinks and told him their war stories. Throckmorton, in return, procured much for his SF friends with their outdated equipment.

Their gratitude was appreciated, but it still didn't give Throckmorton what he really wanted — a piece of the action. Special Forces, headquartered in Nha Trang, frowned on taking along straphangers, particularly if not authorized in advance. One could not justify a young ordnance lieutenant on patrol, no matter how helpful he had been.

Things changed on 21 March 1967 after the Mike Force captured a Viet Cong during a routine patrol. The captive was lightly bound and guarded by a couple of local Nung soldiers. Master Sergeant Charles Hosking stood idly by while the Nung CO conferred with several of the Americans. Hosking, a veteran of World War II, Korea, the Congo and Laos, had a habit of carrying grenades, pins removed, taped to his web gear. Not a safe way of doing things, but he'd seen more combat than almost anyone around and was still alive.

Unnoticed, the VC slipped his bonds, sprung at Hosking, and before the sergeant could stop him tore one of the grenades loose and ran toward the command group. Hosking took the only course of action available and tackled the VC, smothering the grenade with his body. He was killed instantly. The team commander took several fragments and Staff Sergeant Roger Hallberg was left standing, shaken but unhurt. Hosking was later posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his sacrifice.

Throckmorton was attending his friend's memorial service when the Mike Force received another mission. A patrol from Camp Bu Dop, an isolated outpost barely two kilometers from the Cambodian border, had been ambushed and forced to leave a number of dead behind as they retreated. The China Boys were needed to recover the bodies.

Captain Stewart faced a personnel problem. The team medic was so shaken by recent events that he would have to be left behind. Sergeant First Class J.W. Edgell would need to go with the heavy weapons section. That left Stewart with two platoons of Nung troops and only one other American, Sgt. Hallberg. While the Nungs were seasoned soldiers and could probably get by without an American commander, few of them spoke English. Another American was needed.

Stewart grabbed Throckmorton: "We need help. Want



Near this camp at Bu Dop in March 1967, U.S. nuclear policy in Vietnam came close to being compromised. Through enemy intelligence, a routine body recovery mission took on James Bond dimensions.

provided it.

Johnson had struck up a relationship with the Special Forces of the 3rd Mobile Strike (Mike) Force, the "China Boys," stationed in nearby Bien Hoa. He took newly assigned Throckmorton with him for a visit. The Mike Force quickly adopted the young man, ceremoniously in-

eld The Secrets

The Day 'Nam Nearly Went Nuclear

by John Mullins Photos courtesy author



Small Atomic Demolitions Munitions (SADM) could be employed personally such as this practice HALO with dummy device, or could be emplaced statically to prevent enemy capture of strategic locations such as supply depots.

to go for a little walk in the woods? We just need to go out for a couple of hours and recover some bodies." Throckmorton volunteered.

They rose early the next morning and loaded onto Caribou cargo planes for the first leg of the journey. From Bien Hoa to the camp at Bu Dop was a short one-hour flight. From there to the LZ was a

five-minute chopper ride.

Throckmorton and an interpreter joined their element as the aircraft began shuttling the patrol to the LZ. Jack Throckmorton watched the well-trained troopers rush toward the treeline to set up a perimeter once they arrived. In the center of the LZ was a burned-out hulk of another Huey — a reminder of the unseen dangers.

Throckmorton ran toward the treeline, joining Hallberg and Stewart. There had been no firing, no sign of the enemy. The helicopters would be back in a few minutes



SFC Edgell (back row, 2nd from right) was one of only two American members of Mike Force to survive ambush designed to kidnap U.S. Nuclear Weapons Officer Jack Throckmorton — a disaster that could have changed the course of the war.

American unit had been in the area before, meaning only one thing — the presence of a regimental enemy command post. Moments later two Nungs broke and sprinted back toward the LZ. Then the firing began.

Jack Throckmorton remembered seeing dozens of muzzle flashes from the treeline and little outgoing fire. The enemy was so close he could hear shells sliding down mortar tubes. Soldiers all around him were being hit. His weapon jammed and he tried to clear it as the bullets came closer and closer. Perhaps at this point his inexperience was an asset. A more seasoned soldier may have realized how serious the situation was and panicked. Throckmorton kept his head — too scared to panic.

In the middle of all this Hallberg came running back with a sitrep: He estimated they faced a reinforced platoon — tell the captain. He rushed forward, never to be seen again.

By some miracle, or so he thought then, Throckmorton was totally untouched. Unsure of what to do, with most of the men around him already dead or seriously wounded, he began to crawl to the command group for orders. As he did so he noticed the enemy, camouflaged as small bushes, slowly moving in his direction.

Stewart had been shot through the shoulder and looked dazed. He was clutching the handset of the PRC-25 radio he carried, the cord shot away by a bullet. Jack could see that the radio itself had taken several hits and was obviously out of action.

He seemed to gather his wits after Throckmorton told him about Hallberg going back forward. The captain shook his head. It was quite obvious that they'd run up against far more than a reinforced platoon. Later it was determined that two battalions of the 9th VC Division — 500 to 700 men — had mounted the ambush. Stewart had tried to get the heavy weapons platoon inserted to support them, but heavy fire on the LZ had driven them off. His radio had been shot up before he had been able to call in any airstrikes. They'd have to fight it out on their own.

Take Him Alive

The enemy shouting was closer, easily heard even over the din of battle. Stewart turned to the interpreter and asked what they were saying. "They say catch the tall one with white hair. Do not hurt him. Take him alive. He's the one we want."

with the vital heavy weapons platoon so they moved out with Hallberg's platoon on point, and Throckmorton and his men 15 meters to the left.

The first indication of trouble was the sight of telephone wire running along the ground and into the trees. This shook up the Nungs. No American

Stewart looked at Throckmorton, 6 foot 2 inches and white-blond hair. "And why is it they'd want you?" he asked.

"Hell, I don't know," Throckmorton replied. "No way they could know that I'm a nuclear weapons officer."

Stewart looked at Throckmorton in astonishment. As a Special Forces officer, he was acutely aware of Throckmorton's value to the enemy. The Green Berets knew the SADM (Small Atomic Demolitions Munition) well. One or two teams in each SF Group was trained in its use: Get it into the target area, turn it on and run like hell. Even their somewhat limited knowledge was critically sensitive. How much more disastrous for an officer like this, trained on *all* the Army's nuclear weapons, to fall into enemy hands.

"Hoa, take these people," Stewart motioned toward five of the Nungs still alive, "and get the *Trung Ui* (lieutenant) out of here. Go that way. We'll try to hold them off until you get clear."

Throckmorton protested but was cut off. In a scene that haunts him still, he looked back one last time, hearing the characteristic thump of bullets hitting a body, and saw Stewart slump over his rifle.

Right Place, Wrong Time

To his amazement and horror came the shrieking roar of low-flying jets, followed by the explosion of bombs on the nearby LZ. Apparently one of the Nung sergeants had called in the strike over Hallberg's radio. But with no one left to properly direct them, the strikes were equally dangerous to both sides.

A jet roared directly toward him giving him only enough time to drop behind a large tree before 20mm-cannon fire ripped up a tree not 50 meters ahead. Splinters and pieces of flesh decorated the ground. Within seconds the jet was back for a second pass, this time eating up ground a few meters closer. Caught between the jet strikes in front and the VC behind, Throckmorton could only hold his ground and pray.

By the time of the last strike, the VC had pulled back. The Nungs asked the ordnance officer what to do. His only idea was to organize them, move further out of the killing zone, put out perimeter security and hide the group in a small thicket until dark.

Throughout a long afternoon and into the night they listened as the VC finished off the few survivors and beat the bush for him. Expecting discovery at any second, Throckmorton had already vowed to kill himself rather than be taken alive.

When at midnight they were still undiscovered, he thought it safe to start moving toward Bu Dop. He had only the vaguest sense as to where it might be, but to stay where they were was to



Dated weapons, such as this M2 Carbine, of local Nung troopers at Bien Hoa required special procurement techniques, which eventually led to a relationship with a unique ordnance officer.

invite disaster.

Movement was slow: move, stop, listen. They hid as searchers passed by and changed directions when it appeared there was someone ahead. They passed freshly dug enemy positions and more communications wire. By early morning they were tormented by thirst. At one point they passed over a large trail and a hushed argument broke out, some of the Nungs thinking it was the road into Bu Dop. Three of them broke off down the road and were never seen again.

Sometime after first light the shrunken group came to a large clearing. Knowing it was dangerous to cross it, they cautiously skirted along the edge. Slowly they crept, crawling more than walking, expecting at any instant to be met by enemy fire from the distant treeline.

Throckmorton heard the *whomp* of helicopter blades and tried to signal. The gunships saw movement, assumed a strike formation, and were obviously ready to fire up the area. He took off a hat Hoa had given him to hide his blond hair and waved it at them. One of the pilots saw him, and within moments they were airborne, on the way to Bu Dop.

At the Bu Dop airstrip a full colonel waited. He'd been personally sent by General Westmoreland to supervise the massive search and rescue now underway. He shook Jack's hand and said, "The general is pleased that you've been found. We've already sent a transmission to General Throckmorton, letting him know

DR. STRANGELOVE IN VIETNAM

The Small Atomic Demolitions Munition, or SADM (pronounced say-dem), is a so-called "backpack nuke" small enough to hand-implant by a detachment of engineers or a Special Forces team. The yield of such a device is still classified, but contingency plans indicate it is more than enough to destroy a dam that would not yield to conventional explosives, drop a mountainside down on an invading army, vaporize essential command and control installations, wipe out a large formation of tanks or deny an enemy avenue of approach. Exploded at ground level, it is a "dirty" bomb — residual radiation and fallout from such a device causes as many casualties as the initial blast.

That such devices were in Vietnam has been a not very closely guarded secret for many years. At one point a plan was put forward involving a Special Forces team implanting such a device in the Mu Gia Pass, the choke point on the North Vietnam/Laos border through which most supplies and troops traveling down the Ho Chi Minh Trail had to pass. Other contingency plans called for their use inside North Vietnam itself. During the siege of Khe Sanh, and indeed even when the French were surrounded at Dien Bien Phu, the use of such weapons was seriously contemplated by U.S. policy-makers. What was less well-known is that there was also a plan to destroy the huge American supply depots, should they be overrun.

Seeming foolhardy now, these provisions should be judged in the context of their times. American staff officers were haunted by memories of Chinese intervention in the Korean War. Numerous restrictions were placed on pilots flying north, none of them allowed to get anywhere near the China/North Vietnam border. U.S. planners feared a million-man Chinese army, shouting provocation, would have swept south, overrunning the country in a matter of days. All the more reason to deny them the supply depots, and kill a bunch of them in the meantime.

If you have such a device, you must have someone in charge of it. Two someones actually, since U.S. nuclear weapons doctrine incorporates what is known as the "two-man rule." Because we couldn't have some disgruntled or insane individual decide to take out a small city or depot such as Long Binh, two men were needed to detonate the device. Throckmorton and Johnson were such men.

What seems clear is that despite the secrecy surrounding the plans involving these devices, enemy intelligence services were aware of them early on. SADM-trained officers were obviously prime targets for intelligence operations. Their detailed knowledge of internal weapons design and function, employment policy and yield effects, failsafe methods and possible stockpiling data was intelligence information of the highest order.

To North Vietnamese intelligence and their Soviet KGB and GRU counterparts, it must have been an undreamed-of opportunity when they discovered such an officer was within their grasp. We now know both Throckmorton and Johnson were watched closely for the chance of abducting one or both. In a war zone with no real front lines, they were extremely vulnerable.

Interrogation of agents exposed as a result of counterintelligence operations after the Bu Dop Incident revealed that information regarding Throckmorton's participation in the patrol had been quickly passed to the enemy. Thus an operation that had been designed to bloody the Mike Force one more time took on war-altering importance. The 9th Division took extremely heavy casualties in the bombing following the ambush, exposing themselves far more than they normally would. One aerial observer said that they were "swarming out on that LZ like ants."

It must have seemed worth it.

his son has been found. He and General Westmoreland have been terribly worried about you."

"That's very nice of you, sir," Jack replied, "but I'm not the general's son. My father is Colonel Throckmorton." The colonel looked at him in amazement, then utter disgust. "And we stopped the war for you?" he said, turned on his heel, went back into his shiny helicopter and flew away.

NWO MIA

When Throckmorton didn't return from the memorial service, Johnson was worried. Neither he nor the lieutenant was supposed to leave the confines of Long Binh, a restriction they both routinely ignored. He contented himself with the thought that the lieutenant had probably had a few too many after the memorial service and was sleeping it off at the Mike Force team house. Such things had happened before.

But when Throckmorton didn't return the next day, his worry turned into full-blown panic. He notified higher headquarters that a security breach of the worst magnitude had occurred. Within an hour two men from the Army Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) arrived. A very short time later they were on their way to Bien Hoa.

At Bien Hoa, Staff Sgt. J.P. Monaghan received a call alerting headquarters of the action at Bu Dop and notifying them that Stewart, Hallberg and Throckmorton were MIA. Monaghan was trying to get Special Forces troopers from an adjacent C-team together to search

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GEER ON GEAR

Continued from page 55

Snap Slings to me for testing, I passed them on to Colorado police officer Allen Cooper for evaluation. After fitting the different slings to various SWAT weapons, Allen reported back the slings perform as advertised. The Snap Sling is a combat sling that is also useful in police/SWAT operations where the police officer needs a sling that leaves his hands free, while keeping his weapon secure and ready for instant use.

The Snap Sling is made to be used on weapons that mount their slings on the side opposite the ejection port, which limits its use to right-handed shooters on most weapons.

Also, some weapons such as the FN Para, H&K and FNC with standard stocks require an adapter to permit the proper use of the hooks used to attach the Snap Sling. This sling does not work on weapons that mount their slings on the bottom, as with the M16, M14, etc., since mounting the Snap Sling in this manner will cause the weapon to hang upside-down during hands-free carry, but an adapter for the M16 is available.

For more information contact, GRSC, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 1246, Yucaipa, CA 92399.

Galen Geer is SOF's Contributing Editor for outdoor affairs. ☒

THE MAN WHO HELD THE SECRETS

Continued from page 51

for them when Johnson and two men in civilian clothes arrived. Johnson demanded to know the whereabouts of Throckmorton, still believing that he was shacked up somewhere. Monaghan informed him that Throckmorton was missing on a combat action. Johnson turned completely white.

The CIC agents refused to believe it and insisted on searching the camp. While they were engaged in this, Monaghan asked Johnson what was going on. Johnson told him about Throckmorton's special job, and, as Monaghan said later, "I probably

turned a little white, too."

It was time to press the panic button. While Johnson and the CIC argued about whose job it was to notify MACV, a helicopter came in from Bu Dop. On it was Throckmorton, having decided to come back to Mike Force headquarters and see if he could get permission to go back out.

He was quickly whisked away, not under arrest but very nearly so. Back at his own brigade headquarters, he was to tell the story again and again. Realizing just how close to disaster they had come, the brigade commander finally replied, "I don't know whether to put you in for a medal, or court-martial your young ass."

In the end they did neither, merely restricting him to a very circumscribed existence while his MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was changed. His last contact with Special Forces was to testify at a board of inquiry ascertaining the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Stewart and Hallberg — to this day listed as MIA. Consumed by survivor's guilt, and convinced he had done the wrong thing in leaving Stewart and not dying with him,

Throckmorton died a little at a time.

Later events were to show that the operation had been compromised from the beginning. The bartender at the Mike Force club was an active VC agent, as were several other Mike Force members. Privy to the operations plans, it was an easy matter for the 9th VC Division to set up the ambush.

But the compromise went even deeper. Investigation showed that the body recovery mission was a ruse. The only bodies in the area were those of a local Ruff Puff (Regional Force/Popular Force) platoon ambushed by the VC. The Special Forces officer who had requested the mission was later relieved of his duties when evidence showed that he was entirely too close with a double-agent district chief.

Throckmorton and others like him were targets of hostile intelligence services from the moment they began nuclear weapons training. Most attempts to turn them were through classic recruitment methods: money, blackmail and ideological conversion. It must have seemed a gift from heaven when Throckmorton was as-

signed to Vietnam. KGB and GRU residents, working with the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, especially sought any information on U.S. officers in sensitive positions. Should one be captured, they would have been allowed to share in the intelligence bonanza.

The military was not particularly careful to hide Throckmorton from enemy intelligence agencies. He was assigned to Vietnam under his nuclear weapons officer MOS with no attempt to classify his records, or give him a "cover" specialty. We now know that enemy agents had access to the personnel system at MACV and had only to look at the rosters to locate him.

What would have happened if Throckmorton had been captured? There is no doubt he would have resisted to the best of his ability. There is also no doubt he would have been broken. Everyone breaks, sooner or later. The results could have run from the merely disastrous to the horrific. Showcasing a captured nuclear weapons officer and revealing the possible presence of such weapons and contingency plans to use them in Vietnam would have shocked our allies

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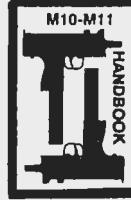
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and given a propaganda victory to the communists that they would have exploited to the limit.

Atomic Nightmare

But it could have been much worse than that. The VC had already shown their ability to penetrate Long Binh. In November 1966, a sapper attack reached the ammunition depot, blowing up thousands of tons of ammunition. Remarkably, security was not improved after this event, U.S. forces believing that their campaign of attrition was the best way of keeping the NVA/VC from mounting such attacks.

A nightmare scenario can easily be built involving another penetration of Long Binh with the intention of securing the SADM. The mere possession of such a device would have provided potent blackmail material. Fifty thousand soldiers, the population of Long Binh, as well as all military and civilian occupants of the fallout zone, could have been held hostage. Even better would have been to detonate it in place. Such an event would have radically altered the course of the war. America could have been forced to withdraw, admitting

defeat, or we could have denied that the weapon was ours. Inasmuch as the only place the enemy could get such a weapon would have been the Soviet Union or China, such a course could have precipitated World War III.

When asked specifically about whether or not he, given his training, could have bypassed the safeguards and exploded the device, Throckmorton reluctantly admits that he could. Even today Jack Throckmorton is hesitant to cast blame for the near-disaster on anyone but himself.

But let us leave aside the wisdom of a policy that resulted in his presence in Vietnam, and the obvious failures of counterintelligence that exposed him. Why would such an awesome responsibility be put on the shoulders of a lieutenant in the first place? His desire to get into the thick of things was understandable; after all, he was a product of the "bear any burden, fight any foe" generation.

"Don't know," he says. "Maybe they figured a young lieutenant would be the only one stupid enough to set it off, if it came to that."

He is probably more right than he knows.

SF veteran John Mullins is a freelance writer residing in Oklahoma. This is his first contribution to SOF. ☒

WALKING TALL

Continued from page 47

the DA's office, largely in concert with Paul Davis. Ross' family is active in the "democratic" electoral process: His wife sits on the county elections board, and his brother is in charge of setting up voting machines.

Ross' name is linked to the still-mysterious resignation of Sheriff Black's predecessor, Kenny Taylor, inexplicably forced out of office after serving only two years, and granted immunity from prosecution for any alleged crimes. Ross was the sole principal in negotiating that resignation. According to state audits of the sheriff's department drug funds for the fiscal years 1988 and 1989, thousands of dollars of questionable disbursements were made under Taylor. Those two audits were "watered

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